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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 000619

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SUBJECT: GOH OPEN TO CUBA RESOLUTION IN GENEVA; REITERATES CONCERN ABOUT CUBAN MEDDLING IN INTERNAL HONDURAN POLITICS

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 03206

Classified By: Ambassador Larry Palmer; Reasons 1.5 (B), and (D).

**¶1.** (C) SUMMARY: WHA Deputy Assistant Secretary Dan Fisk discussed Cuba in meetings with President Maduro, Foreign Minister Perez-Cadalso and Minister of Defense Fred Breve during his February 6-7 visit to Honduras. Foreign Minister Guillermo Perez-Cadalso indicated that Honduras might be willing to vote for/co-sponsor a Cuba human rights resolution at the UN Commission on Human Rights, further noting that Honduras may obtain a seat on the commission. Defense Minister Frederico Breve in another meeting once again raised concerns about Cuban meddling in internal Honduran politics. In the meeting with President Maduro, Fisk noted that President Maduro had raised concerns about Cuban meddling in Honduran affairs with former WHA A/S Reich in mid-2002. Fisk also reiterated the United States' disappointment with the way the restoration of full diplomatic relations between Honduras and Cuba had been handled in the last days of the previous Flores government. While the U.S. preference would be to have President Maduro reconsider the status of GOH-Cuba relations, Fisk asked that, should Honduras name an Ambassador to Havana, at a minimum it should appoint a forceful advocate for human rights and civil society. END SUMMARY

**¶2.** (C) The issue of Cuba was raised in DAS Fisk's February 6-7 meetings with President Maduro, Foreign Minister Perez-Cadalso, and Minister of Defense Fred Breve. In his meeting with the Foreign Minister, Fisk noted that the U.S. remained disappointed in the Honduran decision to normalize fully relations with Cuba and stated that the U.S. preference would be to have the decision reconsidered, appreciating the difficulty of such a move. He also noted, from his discussions with the GOH Ambassador to the U.S., that Washington was aware that there was some continuing discussion within the GOH over the naming of a Honduran ambassador to Cuba. Fisk encouraged the GOH not to move ahead at this time, adding that if the GOH felt compelled to do so, the U.S. hoped it would appoint a strong advocate for human rights and civil society as the first Honduran ambassador to Cuba. Fisk emphasized the U.S. assessment that there has been no noticeable improvement in the human rights situation in Cuba and urged the GOH to engage Cuba on this issue, especially since President Maduro had raised it directly with then-A/S Reich last year.

**¶3.** (C) Fisk reiterated these same points in his meeting with President Maduro as well and added that the U.S. would appreciate being given some forewarning if the GOH decided to move forward with naming an ambassador to Cuba. Maduro once again claimed to have been completely uninformed of the decision by the outgoing government to normalize relations with Cuba. He added a new wrinkle this time, telling Fisk that he had opposed the decision and had so communicated that view to the outgoing Honduran government.

**¶4.** (C) DAS Fisk asked FM Perez-Cadalso for Honduras' support on the annual Cuba human rights resolution at the UN Commission on Human Rights. Perez-Cadalso replied that Honduras shared U.S. concerns about the human rights situation in Cuba and would be inclined to co-sponsor a resolution again this year. More significantly, Perez-Cadalso informed Fisk that Honduras was working to obtain GRULAC support for one of the Latin American seats on the UNCHR. While Perez-Cadalso did not offer an unconditional Honduran vote in favor of a Cuba CHR resolution, he reaffirmed strongly that insistence on greater respect for human rights in Cuba was a fundamental tenet of Honduran foreign policy toward the island. He added that given this context, the GOH would likely co-sponsor a resolution this year and would consider voting for a resolution as well.

**¶5.** (C) Fisk mentioned that President Maduro's call to then WHA Assistant Secretary Otto Reich about Cuban meddling in internal affairs was not the only concern we had heard in the region about Cuban interference in internal affairs. He added that in his meeting earlier in the day MOD Breve had also raised the issue. (In addition, President Maduro also touched on this problem in his meeting with DAS Fisk the next

day.) Fisk advised the FM that if Cuba meddles in Honduras, the GOH could send a strong message back by appointing an ambassador who would engage on democracy and human rights issues there. He told the FM that the GOH would need a tough person in Havana to deal with the Cubans, someone who could send a message. The FM accepted this point. However, he noted that with more than 600 Hondurans now studying medicine in Cuba, it was very important to have a Honduran diplomatic presence there.

¶16. (C) During his meeting with DAS Fisk, MOD Breve asked about the resurgence of leftist group activities throughout Latin American and opined that he felt there was an evident effort to coordinate activities, themes, and tactics across the region, particularly in Central America. Breve said the GOH was concerned about the sources of funding for some labor unions and NGOs in Honduras and noted that there appeared to be a link to Cuban intelligence. Fisk expressed agreement that this resurgence was worrisome and commented that Cuba was neither the sole source of support nor the threat it had once been. He also cautioned Breve that in democratic societies political opposition exists and that civil dissent was a legitimate form of political expression. Fisk conceded the need to be wary of efforts to manipulate that opposition, but pointed out that recognizing Cuba had not helped Honduras.

¶17. (C) Breve then bemoaned the Liberal Party ties to Cuba and charged that the two sides were working together to promote the leftist agenda in Honduras. He also opined that it was now obvious that the Liberals had normalized relations with Cuba in order to obtain resources to fund their political opposition to the Nationalist government.

¶18. (C) COMMENT: Given FM Perez-Cadalso's comments, we believe that Honduras could be a possible co-sponsor of a Cuba resolution. Maduro's and Breve's comments on Cuban meddling follow a consistent pattern of concern that we are hearing. However, as with so much in Honduras, there seems to be little or no effort to take action against the Cubans or to actually substantiate the alleged connections. Interestingly, FM Perez-Cadalso is the first GOH official (and we would have thought least likely on the national security team) to suggest a willingness to take action by reviewing the status of Cuban doctors in Honduras. He added that he would try to remove them if they were involved in inappropriate political activities. (There was a noticeable physical reaction against this comment by Vice Foreign Minister Anibal Quinonez, a career foreign service officer, who was in the meeting.) Finally, Maduro's comment that he opposed normalization of relations with Cuba prior to the previous government's decision should be added to the annals of revisionist history. At best, his transition advisors preserved his plausible deniability; at worst he acquiesced in the decision.

Palmer